Ministry of Attorney General
Justice Services Branch
Family Justice Services Division

A Summary of Evaluation Feedback From Participants in Parenting After Separation Sessions

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1. BACKGROUND AND METHODOLOGIES

This report presents a summary of evaluation feedback received from participants in Parenting After Separation (PAS) sessions which took place in 18 communities in B.C. between April 1, 2001 and March 31, 2002.

PAS, a program of the Ministry of Attorney General, consists of a three-hour information session for parents to help them and their families adjust to separation. In some centres parents are mandated to attend PAS and in others they may attend voluntarily.

Following the PAS session, participants are given the evaluation form shown in Appendix 1 of this report. There are slight variations in the content of the form from site to site, primarily in the extent of demographic information requested and in the follow up to certain questions.

There were 2417 evaluation forms received by the Ministry from the 18 communities. A random sample of 636 forms stratified by community was drawn from this population and entered into a database. This sample size reflects the response rate of the overall population of PAS participants in the year April 1, 2002 to March 31, 2002, at a level of confidence of 98% with a confidence interval of 4%. The strength and consistency of client opinions about learning outcomes reported in Section 4 adds credence to the findings.

Findings are reported in the four sections which follow: participant and session background, session scheduling, learning outcomes for participants, and participant recommendations for PAS.

All qualitative responses were analyzed and grouped in categories for tabular presentation. The raw data were originally analyzed both by gender and by whether the program was mandatory or voluntary. No significant differences on these variables were found for any of the responses although some patterns are noted in the commentaries that follow.

A second set of data pertaining to PAS offered in Cantonese or Mandarin in Vancouver, Richmond and Burnaby was received by the Ministry in aggregated reports for each of 13 sessions, rather than as evaluation forms completed by individual participants. These 13 sessions involved 107 participants, 72 female (67%) and 35 males (33%). The reports for these sessions did not count actual responses but, instead, gave general indications of overall responses. For the most part these general responses appear to reflect similar patterns to those reported in the following sections. However, where an additional or different pattern of responses was evident, this is noted in the summary for that section.

2. PARTICIPANT AND SESSION BACKGROUND

2.1 Type and Location

The PAS programs took place in 18 different communities around B.C. which are listed in Table 1. As indicated in the table, there were two types of programs, nine where participation is voluntary and eight where participants are mandated to attend. As shown in Table 2 the vast majority of the sample attended mandatory programs, since the communities that required attendance tended to be larger in size.

TABLE 1: SESSION LOCATION

Location	Type of Program	Frequency	Percentage
Kootenays			
Castlegar	Voluntary	2	0%
Grand Forks	Voluntary	2	0%
Nelson	Voluntary	1	0%
Trail	Voluntary	5	1%
Okanagan			
Kamloops	Mandatory	57	9%
Kelowna	Mandatory	58	9%
Penticton	Voluntary	5	1%
Lower Mainland			
Abbotsford	Mandatory	80	13%
New Westminster	Mandatory	55	9%
Surrey	Mandatory	177	28%
Vancouver	Mandatory	77	12%
Powell River	Voluntary	5	1%
Squamish	Voluntary	1	0%
Sechelt	Voluntary	4	1%
Vancouver Island			
Campbell River	Voluntary	5	1%
Courtney	Voluntary	3	0%
Nanaimo	Mandatory	44	7%
Victoria	Mandatory	55	9%
Total		**636**	**100%**

TABLE 2: SESSION TYPE

Type of Program	Frequency	Percentage
Mandatory	603	95%
Voluntary	33	5%
Total	**636**	**100%**

2.2 Participant Background

Selected demographic variables of participants are presented in Tables 3 through 6. Observations concerning these tables and/or supplementary data include the following:

- Unlike other locations, the evaluation forms used at the Victoria PAS location contained little or no demographic information. This accounts for the high number of no responses.
- Table 4 shows that there was a wide spread in the length of time that participants had been separated. At times this difference of experience may have created difficulties for the PAS presenter in providing a useful and consistent focus for all participants. This problem is reflected in the comments of participants in Table 11.
- 98% (544/556) of the participants who provided demographic information stated that English was the language they usually speak (NR=80). (The number of participants in the Chinese PAS session is noted in Section 1.)
- 72% (371/513) of respondents had already taken legal action prior to PAS, while 28% (142/513) had not (NR=123).

A small minority of the feedback forms had a space for elaboration on the type of legal action taken; however, the small number of responses and their lack of clarity made it impossible to draw any information from them.

TABLE 3: PARTICIPANT GENDER

Gender	Frequency	Percentage
Male	239	42%
Female	324	58%
Total	**563**	**100%**

Note: Gender was not recorded in 73 cases.

TABLE 4: LENGTH OF SEPARATION

Length of Separation	Frequency	Percentage
Not yet separated	6	10%
Under six months	129	26%
Six months to under one year	64	13%
One year to under two years	70	14%
Two years to under three years	55	11%
Three years and over	164	33%
Never together	12	2%
Total	**500**	**100%**

Note: Length of separation was not recorded in 136 cases.

TABLE 5: NUMBER OF CHILDREN FROM RELATIONSHIP

Number of Children	Frequency	Percentage
1	289	55%
2	168	32%
3 or more	67	12%
Total	**524**	**99%**

Note: Percentages do not total 100% due to rounding.
The number of children was not recorded in 136 cases.

TABLE 6: RELATIONSHIP WITH THE CHILD

Relationship with Child	Frequency	Percentage
Mother	285	51%
Father	220	40%
Step-parent	22	4%
Other family member	22	4%
Other	7	1%
Total	**614**	**100%**

Note: Relationship with child was not recorded in 80 cases.

3. SESSION SCHEDULING

Of 627 respondents who commented on the scheduling of PAS sessions (NR=9), 84% (529) stated that the days and time were convenient to them, and 14% (87) said they were not convenient. (A further 2%, or 11, respondents were not sure.)

Unfortunately, the feedback questionnaire did not ask what day or time the session was held, so it is difficult to interpret these results. However, Table 7 shows the preferred times of some respondents who indicated the session was inconvenient. The majority of those who preferred weekdays preferred an evening session, while those desiring a weekend schedule preferred a morning or afternoon session.

TABLE 7: DESIRED SCHEDULING CHANGES

Time Desired	Frequency	Percentage
Weekdays	24	38%
Weekends	38	62%
Total	**62**	**100%**
Morning	30	42%
Afternoon	15	21%
Evening	27	38%
Total	**72**	**101%**

Note: Percentages do not total 100% due to rounding.

4. LEARNING OUTCOMES FOR PARTICIPANTS

As shown in Table 8, a strong majority of participants indicated that the PAS session had helped them achieve new knowledge and understanding. The main areas of perceived learning, ranging from 85 – 90%, occurred in relation to greater understanding of and communicating with the participants' children. The statements on the left of the table were statements to which respondents were asked to respond.

TABLE 8: LEARNING OUTCOMES OF PARTICIPANTS

Statement of Outcome	Yes	No	DK	Total	NR
This session gave me ideas about how to listen and talk to my children about how they are feeling.	565 90%	44 7%	18 3%	627 100%	9
This seminar helped me to become more aware of my child(ren)'s point of view.	548 88%	50 8%	24 4%	622 100%	14
The session has provided me with information about resources that are useful to me.	533 86%	59 9%	30 5%	622 100%	14
This session helped me to understand the divorce process better.	527 85%	62 10%	32 5%	621 100%	15
The video added to my understanding of separation/divorce issues.	457 76%	95 16%	52 9%	604 101%	32
This session helped me to understand my own feelings about the separation/divorce.	457 74%	111 18%	50 8%	618 100%	18
I would be willing to consider mediation or conciliation as an alternative to going to court in resolving conflicts over children.	445 73%	105 17%	62 10%	612 100%	24

Note: Percentages do not necessarily total 100% due to rounding.

Table 9 presents category data based on an analysis of qualitative responses of participants to the statement "Overall, the two most important things I learned from this session were . . ." As in Table 8, the strongest response related to learnings about children.

TABLE 9: TYPES OF THINGS LEARNED

Types of Things Learned	Frequency	Percentage*
Focus on Child		
Putting the child first/Focus of parenting as top priority.	170	35%
Empathy and understanding of children's experience/communicating with child.	230	45%
Communication		
Tactics for dealing with ex, separating emotions and developing a business-like relationship.	69	14%
General communication skills.	49	10%
Resources		
Mediation process/other non-court options for resolution.	49	10%
Resource or reference material available.	23	5%
Self-Awareness		
Importance of self-improving and taking charge of own life.	56	11%
Stages and cycles of separation.	25	5%
Realizations about own situation due to interaction with group/sense of shared experiences.	29	6%
The Court Process and Legal Information		
Child support issues.	7	1%
Court process and procedures.	38	8%
Information about custody, access and guardianship.	22	4%
Information regarding Family Justice Counselor and Family Justice Centre.	15	3%
Negative or critical conclusions participant has made about legal system.	10	2%
General Responses		
Already knew information/positive affirmation of current and past actions participant has taken.	14	3%
Nothing/session perceived as not applicable to participant.	11	2%
Comment by participant was not usable.	12	2%

Note: There were 508 respondents to this question. Percentages are calculated by dividing the number of participants who gave each response by 508. Since some respondents gave two answers the total percentages exceed 100%.

* Percentage of all respondents who gave this response (N=508).

5. PARTICIPANT ASSESSMENTS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR PAS

Participants were asked to assess the qualities of the presenters for the session, to indicate topics they would have liked more information about, to identify topics which weren't covered that they would like information on and, in general, to state how the session could have been better. These questions were all open-ended; the categories presented in Tables 10 – 12 are based on qualitative analysis of the responses.

The participants were extremely positive about the presenters of the PAS program:

- 98% (598/611) thought that the presenters knew their subject mater well (1 disagreed; 12 DK; NR=25).
- 97% (607/623) of respondents stated that the presenters were well organized. (3 disagreed; 13 DK; NR=13) Reports from the Cantonese and Mandarin programs consistently praised the organization and expertise of the presenters.

Reflecting the learnings in Tables 8 and 9, Table 10 shows that one of the main topics on which supplementary information was desired pertained to children's issues. There was also significant interest in more information on legal issues and court options. It should be noted that feedback on this issue was limited, including only 125 respondents.

TABLE 10: SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION DESIRED BY PARTICIPANTS

Type of Information Desired	Frequency	Percentage
Court and Legal Issues		
Child Support Issues	7	6%
Legal issues, options and proceedings	40	32%
Dealing with Former Spouse		
If former spouse is abusive/volatile/mentally ill.	9	7%
Anger management.	2	2%
If spouse uncooperative or uncommunicative/not acting in best interest of child/not wanting to be involved.	19	13%
Ending relationship/moving on.	2	2%
Programs and Services		
Mediation and alternatives to going to court.	5	4%
Community and counselling support available.	6	5%
Children's Issues		
Child(ren)'s feelings and emotional needs.	26	21%
General parenting issues.	5	4%
Personal Issues		
Emotional needs of self/self-care.	1	1%
New relationships/how to introduce new spouse.	3	2%
Total	**125**	**99%**

Note: Percentages do not total 100% due to rounding.

When asked if an additional topic should be added to the PAS session, 21% (129/612) of the respondents (NR=24) said "yes", while the remaining 79% said additional topics were not needed. Eighty-one respondents suggested additional topics, as shown in Table 11. The majority of these suggestions were to address specific circumstances, such as a particularly violent ex-spouse or the impacts of separation in different age groups of children. Others wanted specific information related to court proceedings.

TABLE 11: ADDITIONAL TOPICS DESIRED BY PARTICIPANTS

Additional Topics Desired	Frequency	Percentage*
Dealing with Ex-Spouse		
"Non-textbook" ex-spouse who is abusive/mentally ill/where mediation isn't an option.	18	15%
Parents who do not want to see their child.	9	7%
When other parent denies access.	4	3%
Power imbalances in dealing with spouse.	10	8%
Specific Circumstances		
Grandparent/other family member issues.	11	9%
Effects of separation on specific age groups; teenagers vs. infants.	14	11%
New relationships/role of new parent.	5	4%
Legal or Court Information		
Step-by-step practical information for working through court system.	16	13%
Rights of child/parents.	7	6%
Other specific legal issues.	8	6%
Biases and problems in court system.	5	4%
Financial information.	3	2%
Support service referrals.	7	6%
General Comments		
Miscellaneous specific suggestions.	4	3%
Unusable comments.	3	2%
Total	**81**	**99%**

Note: Percentages do not total 100% due to rounding.

Approximately a third of participants made suggestions on how the PAS session could be improved, as shown in Table 12. There was no single, dominant response to this question, and almost a quarter of them were vague but non-specific complimentary comments about the program. Of useable comments, the strongest individual expressions of interest were for longer or multiple sessions (18%, 35/196) or for a program which more fully addressed individual circumstances (13%, 25/196). In addition to these comments, one theme was consistently identified in the summaries of responses from the Cantonese and Mandarin PAS sessions. In almost every program the participants desired some form of support services, for example, childcare during the session, or an ongoing support group following the session.

TABLE 12: WHAT WOULD MAKE THE SESSION BETTER

The Program Would Have Been Better If:	Frequency	Percentage
Program Content		
Program more applicable to individual circumstances; e.g. non-parent family member, parents divorced for long length of time.	25	13%
Videos were updated.	9	5%
Age specific advice; infants/teenagers.	3	2%
Less focus on mediation.	5	3%
Length		
Program was longer/multiple sessions, more overall information.	35	18%
Program was less repetitive or shorter.	11	8%
Format and Organization		
Discussion was more personal/smaller group with more time for talking about specific issues/be able to prepare questions beforehand.	21	11%
Specific organizational issue; a presenter did not show up/one presenter doing more talking.	6	3%
The program was not mandatory.	4	2%
Scheduling and Physical Arrangements		
Different time/place.	6	3%
Increased physical comfort/food provided.	9	5%
Childcare available.	2	1%
Personal Circumstances		
If program had been available earlier in divorce process.	4	2%
If ex-spouse was mandated to take program.	4	2%
General Comments		
General positive unspecified.	45	23%
Unusable.	4	2%
Miscellaneous.	3	2%
Total	**196**	**103%**

Note: Percentages do not total 100% due to rounding.

Appendix I: Feedback Form

SESSION EVALUATION

Your opinions are very important to us to improve the quality of the program. We would appreciate it if you would take the time to complete this form.

Date: _____ Location: _____

1. The session helped me to understand the separation/divorce process better. ❑ Yes ❑ No ❑ Don't Know

2. This session helped me to understand my own feelings about the separation/divorce. ❑ Yes ❑ No ❑ Don't Know

3. The session gave me ideas about how to listen and talk to my children about how they are feeling. ❑ Yes ❑ No ❑ Don't Know

4. The session gave me ideas about how to listen and talk to my children about their other parent. ❑ Yes ❑ No ❑ Don't Know

5. This seminar helped me become more aware of my child(ren)'s point of view. ❑ Yes ❑ No ❑ Don't Know

6. This session has provided me with information about resources that are useful to me. ❑ Yes ❑ No ❑ Don't Know

7. The videos added to my understanding of separation/divorce issues. ❑ Yes ❑ No ❑ Don't Know

8. I would be willing to consider mediation or conciliation as an alternative to going to court in resolving conflicts over the children. ❑ Yes ❑ No ❑ Don't Know

9. Were the days and times of the session convenient for you? ❑ Yes ❑ No ❑ Don't Know

10. If no, what would have been a better day/time? Time: _____ am/pm
    ❍ Mon ❍ Tues ❍ Wed ❍ Thurs
    ❍ Fri ❍ Sat ❍ Sun

11. The presenters were well organized. ❑ Yes ❑ No ❑ Don't Know

12. The presenters knew their subject matter well. ❑ Yes ❑ No ❑ Don't Know

13. Overall, the two most important things I learned from this session were:

(1) _____

_____

(2) _____

_____

14. Would you have liked more information on the topics presented? If so, which topics?

_____

_____

15. Were there other topics which weren't covered that you would like to see covered?

_____

_____

16. The session would have been better if:

_____

_____

DEMOGRAPHICS

Sex: ❑ male ❑ female

Language usually spoken: _____

Legal action already taken: _____

How long separated? _____

Number of children from this relationship? _____

You are the child's: ❑ mother ❑ father ❑ stepparent ❑ other family member ❑ other

Thank you very much!